

Parramatta Route of new transport link still up in air

Two-stage plan now for west's light rail

Matt O'Sullivan
Transport

The planned Parramatta light rail project is expected to be built in two stages, reflecting a growing priority within government for a new metro line linking Sydney's central business district and the west.

Instead of constructing the light rail line in one fell swoop as originally planned, sources say there is now a push within the transport bureaucracy to defer the construction of a section of the line between Camellia and Strathfield.

A change in tack would mean the first stage to be built would be from Westmead to Carlingford via Parramatta and Camellia.

The Baird government gave the green light late last year to a corridor for a 22-kilometre light rail line stretching from Westmead to Strathfield via Parramatta and incorporating Carlingford, Camellia and Olympic Park. However, the exact route remains under consideration and is not expected to be unveiled until early next year.

Constructing the line to Strathfield is expected to be one of the most technically challenging aspects because it will need to run along part of Parramatta Road.

However, any decision to delay part of the project and build it in two stages would largely be due to the government placing greater priority on pressing ahead with a new western metro line for single-deck driverless trains.

With the western rail corridor under growing pressure, the *Herald* revealed last month that government planning is under way on a new metro line between the central city and Parramatta.

Asked whether the government was considering plans to build it in two stages, Transport for NSW said "options for delivery are being developed", and it was in the "process of finalising the assessment of the preferred network".

Last week Transport Minister Andrew Constance said one of the lessons to draw from other pro-

jects such as Sydney's light rail line to the eastern suburbs was to select the right route.

"We have a project there [for Parramatta] which is a very long light rail - it is 22 kilometres. That's not the typical length of a light rail project," he said.

"We want to get the design right; we want to get the route structure right in terms of the exact route."

The government has committed to starting construction of the light rail line before the next state election in 2019.

That's not the typical length of a light rail project.

Andrew Constance,
Transport Minister

Sydney Business Chamber's western Sydney director, David Borger, said there was a growing expectation a new metro line would unlock the corridor between Parramatta and Olympic Park.

"But there is also incredible caution because we have seen projects like Epping to Parramatta being delayed and deferred and then not

happening," he said. "No one wants to lose whatever has been put on the table."

The state government has committed \$1 billion to the light rail project, and the federal government a further \$78 million. A total costing for the light rail line has yet to be made public but is expected to climb into the billions of dollars.

The 12-kilometre light rail line under construction from Sydney's CBD to Kensington and Randwick in the southeast is costing \$2.1 billion.

The government expects the private sector to make a significant contribution towards the Parramatta light rail via "value capture". That is a form of public financing aimed at recovering windfall gains landowners pocket from the construction of public infrastructure.

Urban Taskforce chief executive Chris Johnson said he was concerned about the risk of duplication if the government decides to build a new metro line along the western spine of the city. "If it does, it would duplicate a certain amount of that light rail," he said.

Mr Johnson said a metro line would better connect precincts such as Olympic Park and Camellia than light rail.



Western frontier

The Baird government approved a 22-kilometre light rail line from Westmead to Strathfield via Parramatta last year, incorporating Carlingford, Camellia and Olympic Park. But the exact route is still to be unveiled.

CBD

▲ N 5KM